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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on some of the important considerations that characterize historical study in the field of educational technology. Intellectual history is the history of thought or some specific aspect of thought, and is divided into three primary areas of study: (1) biography--studies focusing on the thoughts, work, and lives of single individual; (2) the history of ideas--often a cross-disciplinary endeavor, seeking out important or "great works", illustrating the efforts of exceptional individuals; and (3) the history of culture--emphasis on the "collective mentalities or thought collectives" that exist within given societies at different points in time, focusing on the development of the consciousness of a group and the many topics or influences that help to shape the thought processes of a group. The paper also discusses the relationship of theory and method in historical studies, and provides hints about using conflict as a way to study the history of the academic field of educational technology. Contains a list of 62 references and suggested readings. (Author/SWC)

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Considerations for Studies in Intellectual History in the Field of Educational Communications and Technology

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Whether we like it or not we can never sever our links with the past complete with all its errors. -Ludwik Fleck, 1979, p. 9.

Abstract

This paper reports on some of the important considerations that could characterize historical study in the field of educational technology. It will begin with a brief description of intellectual history. This description will include a deeper discussion of the domains of intellectual history. This in turn will be followed by a discussion of the relationship of theory to method in historical studies. The paper will conclude with hints about using conflict as a way to study the history of the academic field of educational technology.

Introduction

Many professionals seem to be interested in the history of the field in which they practice. Some are interested in knowing their intellectual heritage, others would merely like to have a sense of their professional roots. But recent studies (Young and Januszewski, 1990; Caffarella, 1992; Januszewski, 1994) suggest that there have not been many historical studies conducted in the field of educational communications and technology by members of the field. One can get a feel for the history of the field of educational technology by reading Paul Saettler's *The evolution of American educational technology* (1994). But this encyclopedic approach to the history of the field does not attempt to analyze the intellectual heritage of educational technology. This is the domain of intellectual history.

We usually think of historical studies as focused on the political, military, and economic aspects and accomplishments of a society. In the earlier part of this century, scholars began a movement to study the 'thoughts' of individuals with the hope of developing a broader characterization of the people that live in particular culture at a given time period (Veysey, 1977). This movement became known as "intellectual" history. The idea of intellectual history has spread to a number of arenas including the history of education, and more recently, the history of educational technology (Januszewski, 1994).

Studying the intellectual history of the field of educational technology should help to answer the questions like 'why do educational technologists think the way they do about educational technology?'; 'how has that way of thinking changed with time?'; and why is the field of educational technology the way it is?'. Perhaps these questions appear to invite mere speculation but as historian George Boas stated, "history tells us among other things how we got to think the way we do-and if that is not of importance one wonders what is" (Boas, 1969, p. 3).

What is intellectual history?

Briefly put, intellectual history is the history of thought or some specific aspect of thought. Intellectual history has been divided into three primary areas of study; biography, the history of ideas, and the history of culture (Higham, 1977). Members of the field of educational technology would be most familiar with biography (Human Performance Quarterly and Media and Technology Yearbook). Biographical studies focus on the thoughts, work, and lives of single individuals.

The history of ideas is often a cross disciplinary or perhaps multi-disciplinary endeavor. Here scholars break out of traditional disciplinary boundaries seeking important or "great works". These great works are coherent expressions of thought about some topic in question. These illustrate the efforts of certain exceptional individuals. Exceptional because, by definition, not everyone can produce a great or exceptional work. The study of the great works of a field requires a thorough investigation because one must analyze the content of the work, the context in which the work was written, and the intent with which it was produced.

The history of culture emphasizes the "collective mentalities or thought collectives" that exist within given societies at different points in time (Wood, 1977). Cultures are part of a larger society. Studies in the history of culture focus more on the development of the consciousness of a group and the many topics or influences that help to shape the thought processes of a group. The notion of a collective mentality can be used to describe certain

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localized racial, ethnic, and socio-economic groups of individuals, also intellectual fields and disciplines, etc., such as educational technology.

The difference between the history of ideas and the history of culture is a matter of degree. Studies in the history of ideas and the history of culture often include both, the biographical aspects of individuals who were important to the formulation or a change of a certain idea or conception or a groups way of thinking about an idea.

The essential difference between these last two approaches has to do with the level of conscious thought that a historian chooses to highlight (Veysey, 1977). Although these two approaches to intellectual history have different purposes, they complement and support each other (Higham, 1977). It would seem that the history of ideas plane is easier to study than the history of culture. This is because views are expressed there, or the material being studied, was usually intended to be made more clear and precise. The history of culture is, at least on face, a bit messier. But a good study in intellectual history will consider aspects involved in both of these approaches. There is much to be learned from the study of how consciously articulated ideas become a part of a "thought collective" in a given field of study and how a thought collective influences the work of an individual (Fleck, 1979; Kuhn, 1970).

Theory and method in historical study

In a broad and varied field such as educational technology where each person formulates her or his of view of what the field is, each person could have a correspondingly different view of what the field's history is. The existence of a plurality of histories is not itself a problem. The problem arises when large numbers of members of the field believe that only certain factual content is the limit of the study of the history of the field. Recognizing the fact that there are a number of approaches to studying history brings us to a discussion of theory and method when doing a history study.

When historians, especially intellectual historians, talk about theory and/or method of history they mean something different than educational technologists or instructional designers mean when they talk about theory and method in their area of specialty.

Traditionally, although not exclusively, educational technologists think in terms of a method of research (research methodology) such as experimental design, as a way to investigate, test or prove a theory (or some aspect of it) of instruction or delivery. They see a clear difference between theory and method. The method is a way of gathering data in order to test the theory. It seems desirable to maintain this difference.

Historians do not seek to maintain a difference between theory and method but they so seem to acknowledge that there is such a distinction. Analysis and discussions about theory and method tend to occur within the context of a particular historical study. In the literature of the field of educational technology theory and methodological considerations are usually identified at the beginning of a piece of research.

Historians seem to view the relationship of theory to method much like researchers doing participant-observation or qualitative studies do. There is not the emphasis or effort to separate the knower (researcher), the known (object of study), and the method (the data gathering and analysis techniques) as there might be in traditional educational technology research. In fact, historical research is often considered to be qualitative research. Although I am more comfortable thinking that historical research is a blend of qualitative research methodology (interviews, document search) and conceptual research (approaches from philosophy such as metaphor and concept analysis).

There are specific forums for discussions of theory and method in journals such as *The Journal of the History of Ideas* and *History and Theory*. Time and space (and my lack of in depth knowledge) will simply not allow for a thorough analysis here.

Studying conflict: The historiographical problem of educational technology

Intellectual history can be viewed as an interaction. It can be the interaction between the empirical and the hermeneutical (the intent to understand), the interaction between science and art, the interaction between analysis and expression, or even the interaction between events and thoughts. As used here interaction means a sort of give and take. Sometimes that give and take becomes a conflict. Intellectual history can even be viewed as the study of intellectual conflict. A problem of writing an intellectual history of an academic field was described by Ludwik Fleck:

> It is very difficult, if not impossible, to give an accurate historical account of an academic discipline or a field of study. Many developing strands of thought intersect and interact with one another. All of these would have to be represented; first, as continuous lines of development and, second, in everyone of their many intersections and connections. Third, the main direction of the development, taken as an 'idealized

average', would have to be described separately and at the same time. The continuity of the line of thought that has already been mapped out must continually be interrupted to introduce other lines of thought. The main current of thought would often have to be held up in order to investigate and explain any connections. Often, much has to be omitted to preserve the main current. Instead of a description of dynamic interactions one is often left with an artificial and arbitrary scheme (Fleck, 1979, p. 19).

Fleck is describing the difficulty in developing an historical document that follows a chronological order yet maintains a flow which keeps the reader's attention. He admits that many things are happening simultaneously. Ultimately, it is up to the judgement of the individual historian and writer to determine what content is included in the study and what the sequence of presentation will be.

I think it is also important to think of Fleck's statement as it relates to the study of conflict and intellectual history of an academic field. The historian must ask "what should I include in this analysis?"; "what is the 'main current' of thought here?"; "how did it become the main current of thought?" ; "what alternatives were rejected in order for this thought (or combination of thoughts) to become the main current?"; etc.. the latter questions open the door to studying conflict.

John Wettersten (1975) identified two fundamental considerations of history and its methodological/ theoretical considerations in writing the history of psychology; (1) inductivist history, which includes "true theories", facts, the discoverers, and dates of discovery; and (2) conventionalist history, which says that the theories that were modified to get to present theories should be included. These considerations are also important to studies in the history of educational technology because many educational technologists see themselves as being closely related to and dependent on psychology and learning theory for theory and method. Wettersten puts the fundamental problem of writing a history of psychology this way:

Though historians of psychology have attempted to meet both the inductivist and conventionalist standards, a successful history of psychology cannot be written in this way. There is one crucial fact which forces historians of psychology (of either bent) into difficulties: that the history of psychology is, for the most part, a history of schools. The research produced by the schools does not fit inductivist or conventionalist standards because the theories of different schools contradict each other...(Two) contradictory theories cannot both be true (theory or) be modified anticedents of contemporary theory (p.157).

Wettersten identified five techniques which were used by historians of psychology to avoid their fundamental problem. These techniques "are used to avoid the discussions of controversies, mistakes and problems, and this avoidance leads to a misleading picture of the history of scientific psychology" (pp.157-158). The five techniques are: (1) vague and uncritical praise of certain theories; (2) recognition of fact gathering regardless of the significance of the facts; (3) uncritical praise of methodology; (4) recognition of techniques regardless of the results they produce; and (5) discussion of careers of individuals.

To some extent, attempts to write a history of educational technology face this same dilemma. These writers have also used the same techniques for avoiding that dilemna. Although it is certainly true that the nuances of practice more readily allow for the merging of differing theory bases. But there are probably more interpretations of the basic theories in an applied field which further complicates the problem.

Wettersten argues that there are two solutions to the problems of the incompatibility of contemporary theories: "one may write the history of a single school, or one may seek to reconcile different schools and their histories" (p.159). In either case criticism and failure must be addressed as part of the history if it is not the focus of the history.

His reasoning is that "the history of psychology consists for the most part of the development, conflict and decline of schools" (if a critical history is avoided) "the actual problems, theories aims and mistakes of psychologists- the most important events to understand if one wants to understand the history of any intellectual tradition-are omitted or distorted" (p.171). It seems that in order to write a good intellectual history conflicts cannot be avoided.

What is the root of conflict in an academic field (besides ego and personality issues)? People disagree about ideas, concepts and applications. There seem to be four main reasons for this disagreement: (1) different definitions of terms; (2) the use of different information or authorities; (3) the acceptance of different premises; (4) different inferences drawn from the same premises.

Frequently, particular ideas or conceptions are introduced into professional dialogue for reasons of personal preference and belief (not quite personal reasons but close). Over time this motivation becomes hidden as particular ideas grow in their acceptance as do the plausible options. Historical investigations bring these hidden motivations and options to light. Intellectual historians of educational technology contribute to the self-awareness of the field.

They do this by helping to make the lost and hidden purposes into conscious ones. This result will open them to a critical appraisal that may rekindle the discussion of the moral and ethical responsibility of the professional in our field.

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